

Would you like to know why beavers chop trees?

Latin name: Castor fiber

Appearance

- **Length:** Up to 1 m; tail: 35 cm; weight: up to 30 kg.
- **Paws:** The front paws are like hands with claws to hold small twigs. The rear paws with claws and webbing are a lot bigger. With their front paws and rear paws, beavers can excavate a lodge in the earth.
- **Fur:** It protects them from the cold and wet. It is light brown to black with a density of 12,000 to 23,000 hairs per cm², depending on the area. In comparison, the average person has less than 300 hairs per cm².
- **Guard hair:** Water pressure forces the guard hair close to the body and prevents the wool hair beneath from getting wet.
- **Beaver tail:** The tail is wide, flat and hairless. It is used for steering, propping oneself up on land, storing fat for winter and for communicating, for example slapping on water when there is danger.
- **Teeth:** Like with all rodents, the teeth grow their entire life. They are orange because iron is stored in them. They are sharpened when gnawing.
- **Senses:** Their ears and nose are positioned to keep them above the water when they swim, so that they are aware of anything that happens on land. Their sense of smell is especially good.

Reproduction

From the outside you can't tell a female and a male beaver apart. Their genitals are hidden in skin creases. Mating season is from January to March. After about 100 days of gestation, their young are born. There are usually two to three young, which are nursed for eight weeks.

The first weeks of life

In their second week of life, they nibble on plants and in their third week they begin to eat them. From their first day of life they can swim, but they stay in their lodge for the first eight weeks and splash about in the entrance area. When they are approximately one month old, they go on their first trips with their parents. When there is danger, they flee onto the backs of their parents. The parents fully care for their young in their first year of life. The cohesion among the beaver family is very strong. Males and females often stay together their whole lives. All family members greet each other by their sounds and by sniffing each other. At night they snuggle up close to sleep. They also groom their fur together. After two years, the young beavers leave the family lodge and move further away. They wander along the water in search of their own territory.

BEAVER FACT SHEET

www.tierschutzmachtschule.at



Food

Beavers are herbivores. In spring and summer they feed on grass, herbs and water plants, but also sweetcorn, rapeseed and sugarcane where they grow close enough to the water. In autumn and winter tree bark and buds are on the menu. That's why they fell trees.

Felling trees

It mostly happens during the night or at dusk. Beavers don't gnaw through the whole tree, as it would fall on them. They gnaw at a tree trunk and wait until it falls. The trunk shows a typical hourglass shape. A trunk of 20 cm diameter can be felled by a beaver within one night.



Territory

They mark their territory with a secretion to keep other beavers at bay. The secretion smells of musk and is called castoreum. It is still used by some companies to produce perfume.

Beavers in winter

They don't hibernate. In the cold season they spend up to 20 hours a day in their lodge, where they keep each other warm. During this time, they store twigs near the entrance, so they have something to eat when the water freezes over. Their dense fur protects them from the cold. In summer they put on three to four kilos of fat layer which is stored especially on the belly and in the tail. It is used up during winter.

Danger when wandering

Because space around water is scarce, there are often fights between beavers. They sometimes hurt each other so badly that they die from their injuries. This was intended by nature so there will never be too many beavers along one river. One beaver family needs many trees and water plants in their territory. Therefore, they need a large distance between them and the next family.

Beaver pond

The average size of a beaver pond is four hectares.

Beaver border

They move 15 to 20 m away from the bank at most when they fell trees. When rivers have a broad bank, they can happily live there. When gardens or fields are close to the water, it can happen that they find their food there. Therefore, it is important that people leave a wide riverbank for beavers. They can live in peace and not disturb people.

Beaver lodge

Their lodges are on the banks. They dig a canal under water into the bank. At the end of it they build a cave. This big chamber is kept dry and peppered with wood chippings which act like a carpet and keep the floor warm, dry and clean. Beavers only go to the toilet in the water. Some beaver lodges have multiple chambers.

They have three different types of lodges:

- **Bank lodge:** It is on the bank of the water, deep underground. They create a small air-hole in only one spot. From the outside one can hardly see a bank lodge.
- **Semi-lodge:** It is created on banks that are less than a meter high above water. They can build a cave there, but the ceiling often collapses. Therefore, they cover it with branches, and create a roof.
- **Free standing lodge:** The chamber is in a large heap of branches. They often build this type of lodge when the bank is quite low.

Beaver dam

When building a dam, beavers prevent a body of water from drying up and freezing over. With a dam they can make the water level higher and settle on river areas that otherwise would only have little water. They know exactly where the best spots are for building dams: Where the water flows slowly and is shallow, and drifting branches and mud are easily collected. The whole family helps to build a dam that can be up to 100 m wide. The average length is between one and ten meters.

Constructions acting as habitats for many animals

Beavers carry mud between their chin and front paws. Their constructions act as a habitat for many animal species. Close to the dam, water flows more slowly and young river fish can grow in peace. Toads, frogs and newts find new habitats here. Kingfishers and wild bees settle in the breaks of the banks that arise when beavers build their lodges. Their constructions attract many different animal species. Dull river areas turn into beautiful wild ones.

Humans and beavers

The presence of beavers also helps humans. When beavers create areas in rivers with calm waters it can protect those areas from flooding.

This is how coexisting with beavers can work:

Please consider the beavers' wishes: Keep your distance and put your dogs on a leash. When beavers feel threatened, they don't always flee. Beavers can also defend themselves by biting.

Protection for the riverbanks and trees

Within the 15 to 20 m bank zone: If a bank should not be excavated or beavers should leave individual trees alone, people can:

- Put wire fences around tree trunks.
- Put wire mesh in ponds and banks.

Please give the beavers space on the banks and respect their constructions.